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MUSEUM

No solace for spooks

The Senate Select Intelligence Committee this month heard a proposal to establish a National Historical Intelligence Museum. What a dumb idea.

The hearing, of course, was public. So, too, would be the museum. And if that doesn't create any problems, U.S. secret intelligence must be worse than we thought.

As it is, the Central Intelligence Agency recently overcounted the Cubans in Grenada. Critics suggest that human spies cruising seedy bars count better than satellites cruising high in the air.

Maybe so. But human spies also know enough not to get caught dead in a museum.

What's left? Paraphernalia. The leading candidate is a wooden American eagle the Russians once bugged in the U.S. embassy in Moscow. The eagle made good television 20 years ago, co-starring with U.N. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson. But can it still draw the crowds? Nobody knows.

The same goes for satellite

photographs. Paraphrasing Groucho Marx, does anyone want to see a spy picture the CIA is willing to show them?

Don't worry. Real spies won't stand still for the museum. For a time, former spy Edwin Wilson even refused to stand still long enough for the courts.

We can guess where he learned the technique. CIA Director William J. Casey genially boosted the museum when he testified at this month's hearing. The way he did it would warm a double-agent's heart. First Casey "heartily endorsed" the museum, then he said someone else would have to stock it: "I would not want to mislead anyone into expecting us (the CIA) to be a major source of exhibits..."

So much for that. The Department of Agriculture doesn't spy much, and the Navy's so tight with its secrets it still won't say what the Monitor found out about the Merrimack.

No, the CIA is the storehouse. If the spies won't come in from the cold, the museum's out in it, too.